

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 16, 2001

CONTACT:
Dena Graziano(202) 226-6888

CONYERS CHALLENGES ADMINISTRATION ON MILITARY TRIBUNALS AND OTHER ANTI-TERRORISM EDITS

Today Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee joined other Democratic members of the House Judiciary Committee to address the recent actions taken by the Administration regarding Military Tribunals and other anti-terrorism acts.

Congressman Conyers issued the following statement regarding these recent actions:

“Today we stand on the verge of a civil liberties calamity in this country. The Administration and the Attorney General have taken a series of constitutionally dubious actions that place the Executive branch in the untenable role of legislator, prosecutor, judge, and jury.

Certainly, we stand together as a nation in our collective outrage over the September 11th terrorist attacks. However, we do nothing to win the battle against terrorism by sacrificing our precious freedoms and liberties.

We have been down this road of overreaction before. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln suspended habeas corpus. After World War I, our government wrongfully beat and deported thousands of immigrants. During World War II, we placed Japanese-Americans in internment camps. After the Oklahoma City bombing we gutted habeas corpus and decimated our immigration laws.

When Congress passed the Anti-Terrorism bill last month, I was concerned that the Attorney General would unilaterally and unjustifiably seek to expand the government’s powers. But I never dreamed he would make me a prophet so quickly. Since then Mr. Ashcroft has dealt one hammer blow after another to the very constitutional values he repeatedly promised to uphold at his confirmation hearings.

First, the Attorney General totally ignored my letter of October 31st asking for information concerning the 1,000 plus immigrants who have been detained for undisclosed reasons since the September attacks.

On October 31st, the Attorney General issued regulations permitting the Department of Justice to unilaterally intercept attorney-client phone calls.

On November 9th, the Administration announced a policy of ethnic profiling by which it would discriminate in granting visas to men from middle eastern countries and target 5,000 Arab male visitors for intensive questioning. Surely in 21st Century America we can do better than saying than if you are Arab you are a suspect.

Finally, on November 13th, the Administration announced the creation of secret military courts to try immigrants and other foreigners for terrorism offenses.

Collectively, the Administration has swept away the independent judiciary, the right to a public trial, the right to an appeal, the right to counsel, due process, equal protection and habeas corpus. Not bad for two week’s work.

We are here to remind our Attorney General that the Constitution applies just as forcefully after September 11th as it did before September 11th. I urge the Administration to not only reconsider these hasty actions, but to commit to consult and work with Congress before they issue any further edicts which erode our civil liberties and alienate our enemies.”